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INT FOREST & RANGE EXPERIMENT STATION

U.S. Forest Service Westwide Avalanche Network FEB 11 1995

DECEMBER 1985

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A major (and lasting) weather pattern change in the second week of December turned the month into a Jekyll and Hyde act. Early December brought a continuation of the snowy November weather, but then the long-wave pattern shifted and established an impenetrable ridge over the West. The result? A severe constriction of the snow spigot.

No snow at all fell in the Cascades from the 9th to 29th; in the Sierra from the 12th to 29th; at Sun Valley, ID from the 10th to 31st; in Utah from the 11th to 29th; in central and southern Colorado from the 15th to 29th; and at Taos, NM from the 14th to 30th.

Snowfalls expressed as a percent of December normals were: in Alaska — Alyeska, 47%; in the Cascades — Mt. Hood Meadows, OR, 49%; Stevens Pass, WA, 36%; Mt. Rainier, WA, 31%; and Crystal Mtn., WA, 24%; in the Sierra — Alpine Meadows, CA 33%; and Squaw Valley, CA, 15%; in the Intermountain region — Sun Valley, 30%; and Bridger Bowl, MT, 24%; in Colorado — Berthoud Pass, 108%; Gothic, 104%; Breckenridge, 96%; Sunlight, 94%; Copper Mtn., 89%; Monarch, 81%; Crested Butte, 79%; Winter Park, 79%; Wolf Creek, 62%; Vail, 58%; and Aspen Mtn., 43%.

Avalanche activity, not unexpectedly, was on the light side in December. Eight reported events caught patrollers or lift skiers. On the 7th, a skier was injured at Big Mtn., MT; and on the 31st, a patroller at Aspen Mtn. was totally buried and suffered a slight injury when caught in a small, loose—snow slide. The worst incident, however, happened at Jackson Hole, WY on the 2nd, before the area had begun its season. Six patrollers were setting up a sign line in Rendezvous Bowl when Dean's Slide pulled out above them in a 5-foot-deep hard slab. (This slope had been hit with two hand charges earlier in the day, with no avalanche release.) All six were caught; but the man lowest on the slope was buried 6 feet deep. Although the survivors located the victim's burial position with beacons, they had only one shovel among them. Other rescuers soon arrived, but it was 40 minutes before the victim was uncovered. Resuscitation failed; he had died of suffocation. This was the first avalanche death at Jackson Hole in 21 years of operation.

Through December, avalanches have caught 30 people, wholly or partly buried 21, injured 4, and killed 7. Three vehicles have been caught, and one damaged.

(Note: Tabulated data for November is included with this summary. Please attach to your November narrative.)

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ALPINE SNOW AND AVALANCHE RESEARCH PROJECT RM STATION FORT COLLINS, COLO.

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U.S. FOREST SERVICE ALPINE SNOW AND AVALANCHE RESEARCH PROJECT RM STATION FORT COLLINS, COLO.

SUMMARY OF WEATHER AND SNOW CONDITIONS NOVEMBER 1985

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